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ABSTRACT

The author describes an approach to course planning combining the fulfillment of instructor responsibilities with student involvement. This approach facilitates the student's self-determination of educational objectives and self-evaluation of achievement. To promote student involvement, the author suggests three requisite conditions: (1) self-directed learning; (2) student's acceptance of responsibility for his own learning; and (3) self-evaluation as a necessary input to self-responsibility in a learning situation. The author supports this approach with materials from contemporary educational philosophy and provides a practical guide for implementation of the approach. (LG)

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PLANNING FOR A STUDENT DIRECTED, STUDENT EVALUATED LEARNING SITUATION

by

William A. Ternent, Ph.D.

Overview

Contemporary trends in education are moving toward greater student involvement in developing learning processes with emphasis on student acceptance of responsibility for learning and for evaluating his or her educational outcomes.

This paper describes a process used to implement an approach (with a very traditional speech course), suggests some typical conditions encountered in implementing it over three successive course offerings, and suggests some reasonable expectations for outcomes from such an educational approach.

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I. Purpose and Limitations of the Discussion

To describe an approach to course planning which

- - fulfills an instructor's responsibilities to the institution and to the student in terms of the curriculum, content and cognitive outcomes

while

- - focusing on educational philosophic views and methodological approaches which stress: 1) student self-directed learning and the student's acceptance of responsibility for his (her) learning; and 2) student self-evaluation as a necessary input to self-responsibility in a learning situation.

The approach described was tested by the author. The discussion herein is limited to the process. However, exhibits will be presented which elaborate on the process.

II. Assumptions in undertaking a student directed, student evaluated approach

The approach discussed herein may work well but be deemed a failure by a user if the user subscribes to a different set of assumptions.

Broadly speaking, the student directed, self-evaluated approach which the process described herein can produce has these philosophical and theoretical connections:

1. Philosophical Base - The approach is existentially[1] oriented, finding limited value in the:

[1] See G.F. Kneller's, Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, John Wiley & Sons: New York, 1964 for fuller descriptions of these philosphical sets.

a) Classically oriented authoritarian tenor of perenialism.[1]

b) Tradition bound, "subject matter first" orientation of the educational essentialist.[1]

c) The progressivist[1] approach where learning is bound in the tentacles of education with a social twist and significance.

d) The manipulative intent and collectivist value oriented approach of the educational reconstructionist.[1]

2. Methodological Base - The approach:

a) Is multi-media in terms of teaching procedures or structural approaches (such as the "lecture method" or "programmed instruction method", etc.)

b) Assumes that the individual student is more important in the educative process than subject matter concerns and social expectations.[2]

c) Focuses on creating a climate for creative thinking by students as opposed to climates stressing repetition or productive thinking.[3]

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[2]See Motivation Quarterly, College of Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, Vol. 1, No. 2, January, 1971.

[3]See In Search of Teaching Style, Abraham Shumsky with participation of Adaia Shumsky, Appleton-Century-Crofts Division of Meredith Corp., New York, 1968.

The basic assumptions which have guided this process of planning for student directed and evaluated learning are:

1. The individual searching for his or her very personal meaning in a time-bound segment of an on-going universe is what education is all about. Subjects may come and subjects may go, but those which remain for the individual are those which he or she finds some subjective meaning for in his or her being.

2. As a corollary to assumption one, not all subjects which an individual may elect or have to encounter in an educational setting are necessarily useful. That is, just because a subject is deemed useful for all students does not mean that it is, in reality, useful or meaningful -- immediately or ultimately -- to all students.

3. Failure -- assuming some minimum state of readiness and basic mental capability and capacity -- of a specific subject by traditional standards may merely mean that the individual has discovered a lack of meaning or vitality for him-or herself concerning the subject. In this sense, failure may be a very positive outcome.

4. The individual is responsible for the knowledge he acquires. Further, the validity of the knowledge that is acquired is determined by the value found in it by the learner. "The truely human aspect of man's existance lies in his acceptance of the responsibility for developing his own being, in other words, for developing a mature self." The responsibility of the teacher and of the educational system is to promote such a happening for the individual.

Learner values that are not freely chosen are indeed valueless.

5. In every situation -- including the classroom -- the individual is truely free to choose how he or she will relate with his or her world of things and people. The classroom should reflect this reality of living and become a place where learners may make choices, test them out and revise them without fear of reprisal. The classroom should be a place where one can make poor choices, "fail" in the traditional sense, and still "pass".

6. The only expectation in a classroom should be one of success.

7. Good teaching -- successful learner outcomes -- may best be measured by the degree to which the "normal curve" gets bent out of shape by the learning process. That is, given a distribution which is "normally distributed" at the outset, the outcome of a successful learning situation would not be merely an incremental cognitive improvement and a "new" normal curve. Rather, a successful learning outcome should be considered to be that case where there is cognitive improvement, radical reduction of variance, and highly personalized cognitive and affective outcomes.

8. The teacher or instructor has no set "role" to play in the learning situation. Rather, the teacher must be prepared to provide a variety of orientations based upon individual and learner group needs and interests.

9. The approach to subject materials should be on what will be or may be; that is, on becoming rather than on the finality of what now is. Such an approach demands a

respect for and concern in comprehending the "state-of-the-art" but places it in its incremental perspective.

III. The Planning Process

The Process is built around four activities:

1) Course development

2) Teaching Plan Development

3) Evaluation Plan Development

4) Data Plan Development

These are shown on a time line in flow chart form in Figure 1.

A. Pre-instructional Activities

As shown, the process starts with the development of instructional objectives (see event (1) in Figure 1) and the enunciation of teaching strategies which are relevant and reasonable to the specific situation (a sample of instructional objectives for a course is shown in Figure 2.) This is an admission of the real constraints and expectations of the institutional environment and the assumption that the teaching profession should not be exempt from a wide range of evaluative frameworks (in short, there is no room for shallow planning, impersonal relationships with students and instructional outcomes, and trite, purely (or nearly so) cognitive based expectations from the experience.)

Emphasis on a student directed course is not an invitation to relax and see what happens. The instructor is obligated to anticipate how his students may approach the subject (see (2) in Figure 1) if he is to prepare himself to assist them in their adventure in learning (a Flow Chart

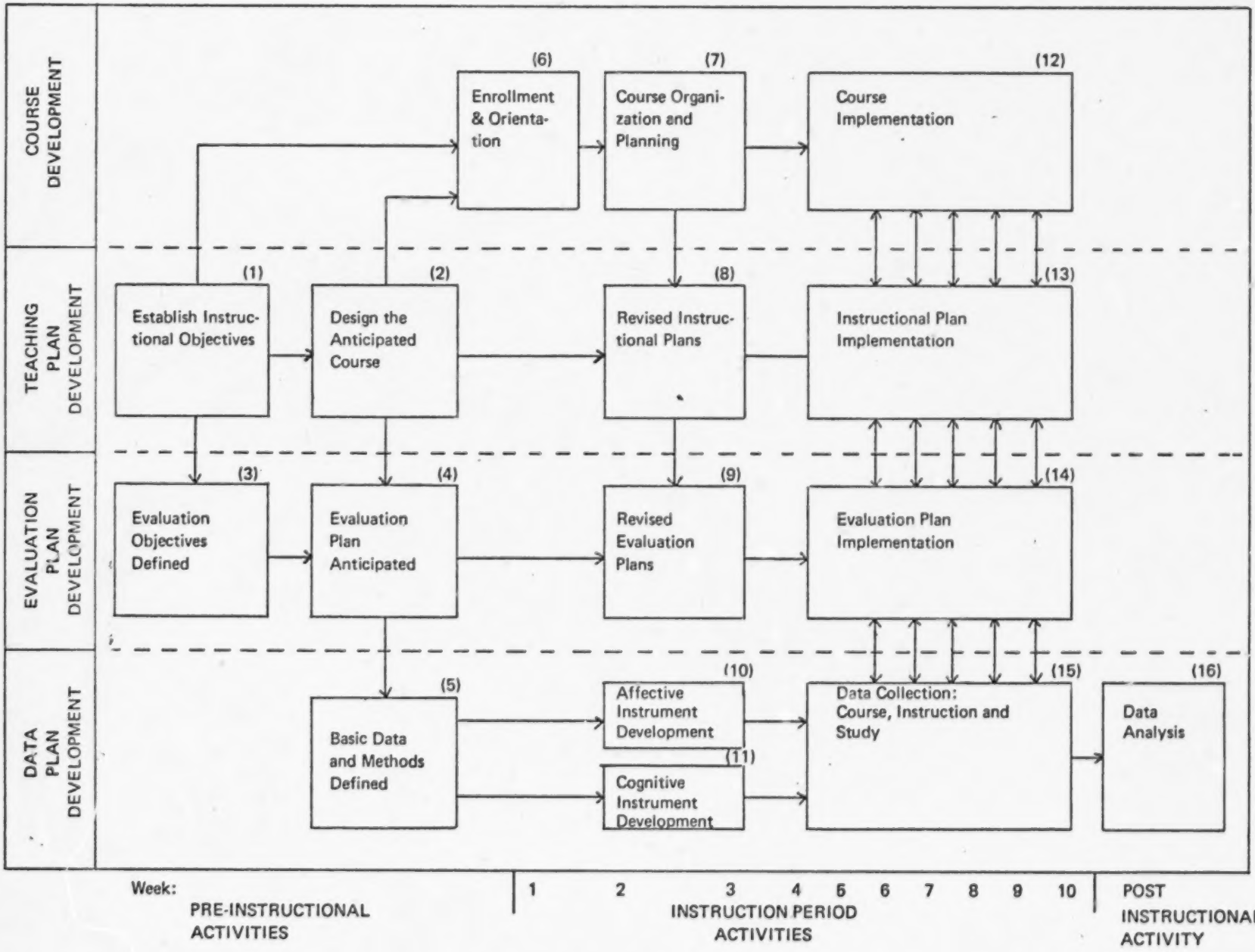
COURSE DEVELOPMENT
TEACHING PLAN DEVELOPMENT
EVALUATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT
DATA PLAN DEVELOPMENT
(1)
Establish Instructional Objectives
(2)
Design the Anticipated Course
(3)
Evaluation Objectives Defined
(4)
Evaluation Plan Anticipated
(5)
Basic Data and Methods Defined
(6)
Enrollment & Orientation
(7)
Course Organization and Planning
(8)
Revised Instructional Plans
(9)
Revised Evaluation Plans
(10)
Affective Instrument Development
(11)
Cognitive Instrument Development
(12)
Course Implementation
(13)
Instructional Plan Implementation
(14)
Evaluation Plan Implementation
(15)
Data Collection: Course, Instruction and Study
(16)
Data Analysis
Week:
PRE-INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
INSTRUCTION PERIOD ACTIVITIES
POST INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

Figure 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	TEACHING STRATEGIES
1. Realize a significant cognitive gain related to: a) the subject matter itself; b) the individual learner's context concerning the subject matter.	I. CONTENT 1. Pre- and post-tests used as measurement mechanism and learning device. (I) 2. Study and discussion of text (I) 3. Development of group organization and application of subject matter. (IV) 4. Observation and evaluation of user groups. (III)
2. Encourage individual learner self-responsibility in the learning situation and personal involvement with the subject.	II. SELF-RESPONSIBILITY 1. Enunciation of individual learner objectives and obligations in the learning situation. (I) 2. Participation in the planning course implementation mechanisms. (II) 3. Participation in establishing learner evaluation criteria. (II) 4. Create situations of constructive ambiguity in the group situation. (IV) 5. Permit increasing acceptance of responsibility by the learner group. (IV)
3. Encourage divergent thinking as an invitation toward creative ventures and a widening view of the possible implications of application of the subject matter. (III)	III. DIVERGENT THINKING 1. Encourage development of individual, thoughtful, subjective meanings related to the content. (II) 2. Encourage extrapolation from the usual or conventional context to other possible contexts; to interpret the subject matter; to venture into the unknown. (IV)
4. Encourage the development of greater individual learner self-awareness and interpersonal effectiveness. (IV)	IV. SELF-AWARENESS AND INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS 1. Encourage and stimulate small group work. (IV) 2. Create atmosphere for direct, open interaction among learners (III) 3. Encourage individual development projects. (III)

Brackets indicate major contribution of strategies toward achievement of learning objectives.

Figure 2: Learning Objectives and Teaching Strategies

of such an anticipated course activity plan is shown in Figure 3.).

From these pre-instructional activities, the instructor can build basic study objectives (see (3) in Figure 1), anticipate how he may study both cognitive and affective aspects of the learning experience (see (4) in Figure 1) and define basic data needs for subsequent evaluation of the learning experience (see (5) in Figure 1).

Such prior anticipation -- realizing that developments in the learning situation may require drastic change -- are necessary for the instructor to be prepared for some basic alternatives he may encounter and to thrust him into a potentially realistic psychological field in preparing to deal with his student group(s). (Moreover, most college terms are too short to afford the luxury of purely feeling your way through the experience.) Instructor self-deception is a possibility, but awareness of one's philosophical and theoretical positions on education, and a conscious attempt not to create an inflexible approach before the fact, can assure openness to subsequent change based upon results of the classroom encounter.

(If, indeed, the instructor cannot anticipate possible student approaches and interests in dealing with the subject matter, it may be that he has lost touch with contemporary America and perhaps become an incapable or ineffective teacher [in terms of the philosophical and theoretical positions advanced herein]).

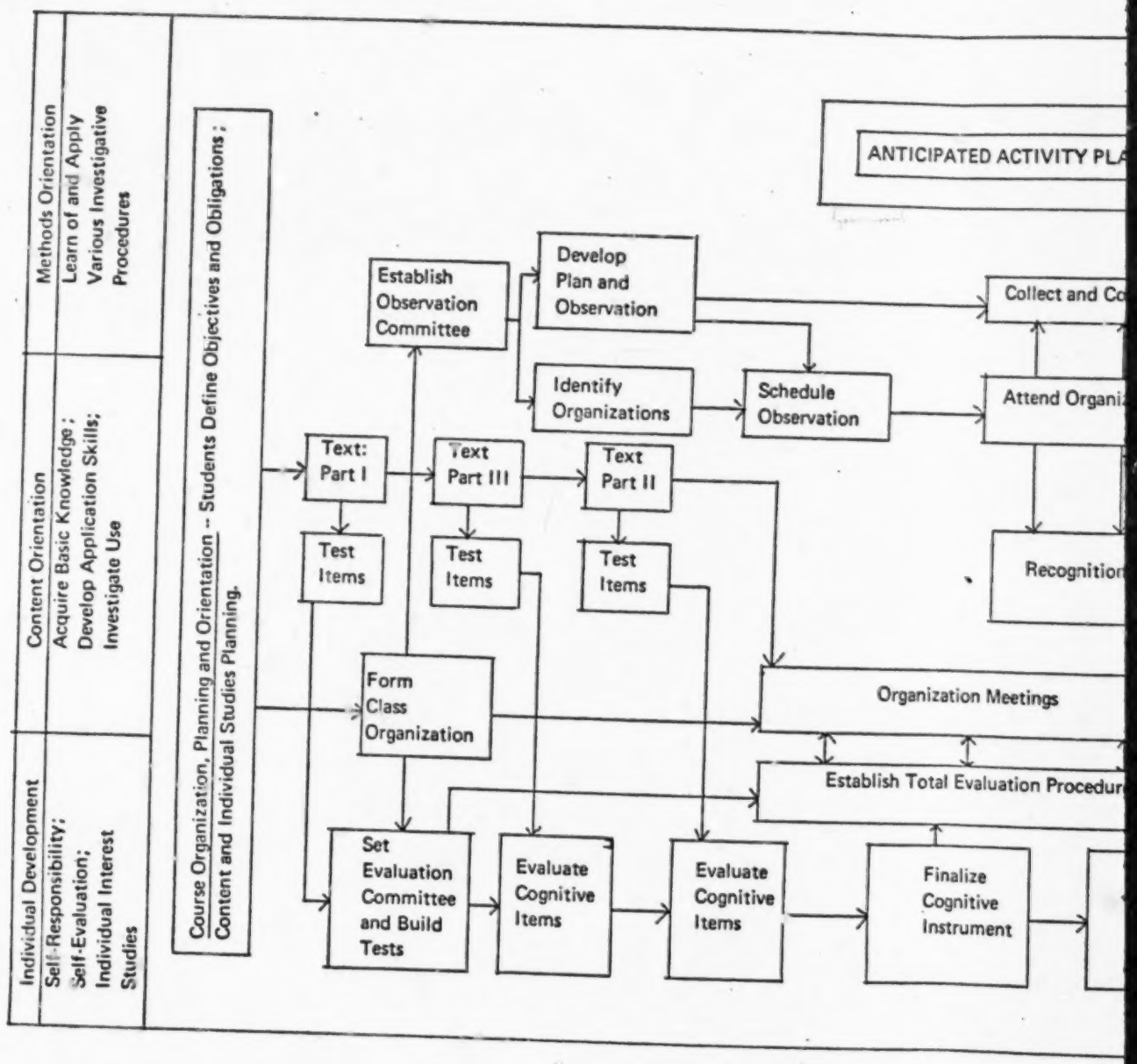
Individual Development
Self-Responsibility;
Self-Evaluation;
Individual Interest Studies
Content Orientation
Acquire Basic Knowledge;
Develop Application Skills;
Investigate Use
Methods Orientation
Learn of and Apply Various Investigative Procedures
Course Organization, Planning and Orientation -- Students Define Objectives and Obligations; Content and Individual Studies Planning.
ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY PLA
Establish Observation Committee
Develop Plan and Observation
Collect and Co
Identify Organizations
Schedule Observation
Attend Organi
Text: Part I
Text Part III
Text Part II
Test Items
Test Items
Test Items
Recognition
Form Class Organization
Organization Meetings
Establish Total Evaluation Procedur
Set Evaluation Committee and Build Tests
Evaluate Cognitive Items
Evaluate Cognitive Items
Finalize Cognitive Instrument

FIGURE 3

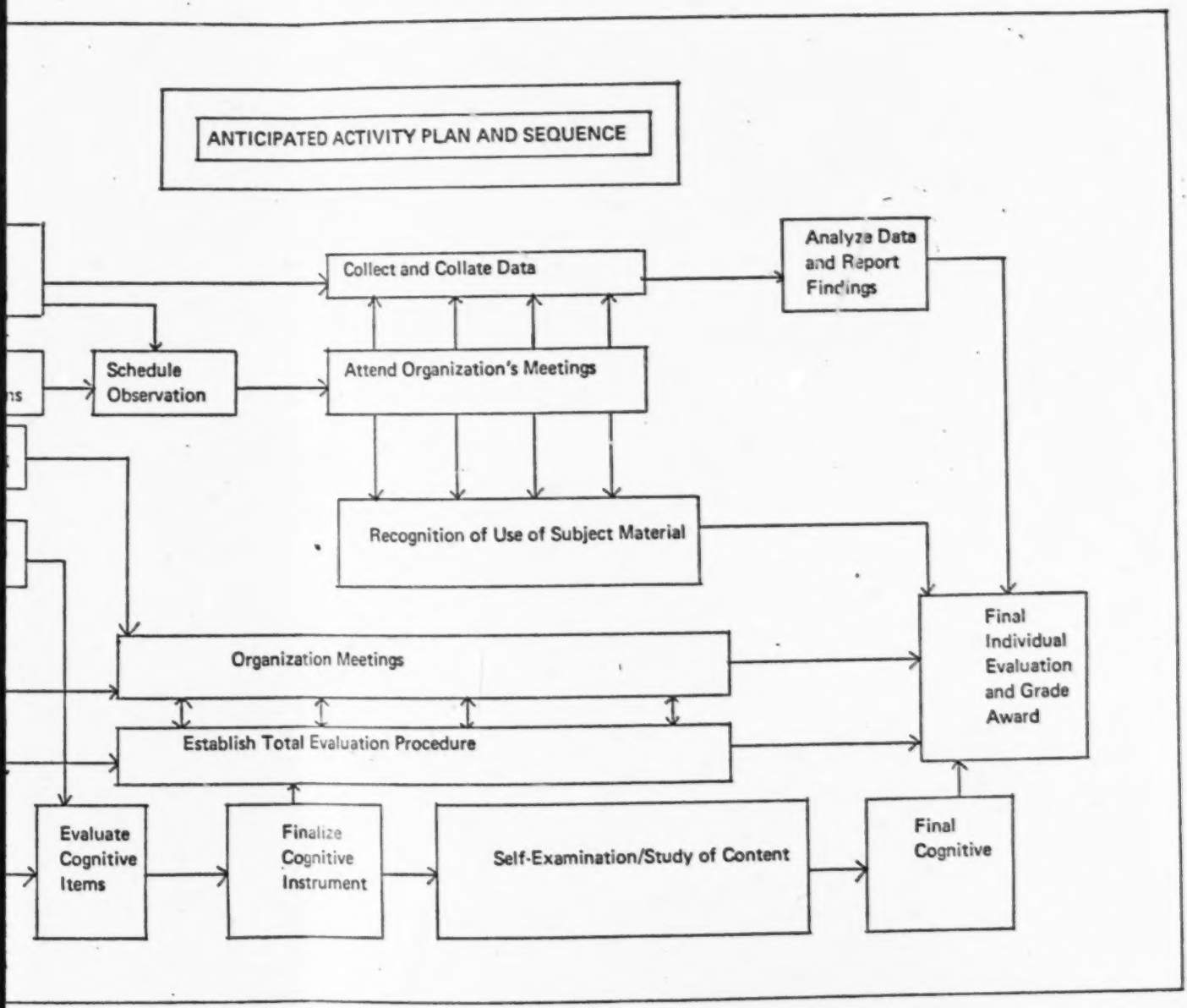
ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY PLAN AND SEQUENCE
Collect and Collate Data
Analyze Data and Report Findings
Schedule Observation
Attend Organization's Meetings
Recognition of Use of Subject Material
Final Individual Evaluation and Grade Award
Organization Meetings
Establish Total Evaluation Procedure
Evaluate Cognitive Items
Finalize Cognitive Instrument
Self-Examination/Study of Content
Final Cognitive

FIGURE 3

B. Instruction Period Activities

Just as pre-instructional activities of establishing learning objectives ((1), Fig.1) and anticipating how a group of students will design their learning experience ((2), Fig.1) initialize a variety of activities and decisions, the enrollment and orientation ((6), Fig.1) of the class group and the groups' subsequent organization and planning of the learning experience ((7), Fig.1) initialize revision of instructional plans of the instructor ((8), Fig.1), revision of evaluation plans ((9), Fig.1), affective and cognitive instrument development ((10 and 11), Fig.1.)

(Typically, and as one might suspect, class groups tend to build their learning experience along quite traditional, subject-oriented lines. Also, placed in a student-oriented rather than teacher-authority-oriented situation, students typically seek the instructor's advise, his reflections on how other students have approached the problem, and his council on what some possible approaches might be which go beyond the ordinary. Typically, too, there will be a measure of distrust of the situation and the instructor among those who have learned in our schools to rely on others for decisions, for definitions of right and wrong, for orders as to how to manage their time, their minds, and their learning.)

The remainder of the instruction period involves working the plans -- Course; teaching; evaluation; data ((12, 13, 14, and 15), Fig. 1). Typically, these will change as students test their approaches, become more self-critical, more personally involved in their learning

(or perceived lack of it.) It is also typical for the instructor to become more of a resource person rather than one who instructs; a counselor rather than a dictator of ways, criteria and methods. It is also true that the instructor will become immersed in individual problems of students in approaching life and learning (synonymous terms in a very practical sense.) An instructor can expect to be tested, torn, tempted to revert to former ways, and stretched beyond his pre-instructional intellectual and educational boundaries.

For the individual student and for the student group, one may expect to encounter some measure of trauma in facing the question of self-evaluation utilizing information gathered in relation to each student's self-assigned objectives in the learning situation. For many students it is a moment of truth -- a moment of personal growth in self-awareness, self-worth, and social awareness.

C. Post-Instructional Activity

Analysis of data collected ((16), Fig. 1) leads to an instructor's revision of pre-instructional activities. In short, the instructor who immerses himself in the task of building a student directed and evaluated learning situation will never find himself stagnating in terms of his "teaching."

IV. Outcomes

Experiences from three successive implementations (college level) of this process suggest the following:

1) Classes vary in what they emphasize, but do not

abandon reasonable activity expectations based upon an analysis of student and instructor obligations and responsibilities which come with electing to be in the classroom.

2) "Control" problems are non-existent.

3) Cognitive gain is high for all involved and there is a radical reduction of cognitive variance related to the subject.

4) Students become more self-responsible for their learning.

5) Interpersonal "distance" decreases. Students become more open to one another, more trusting.

6) Students tend to expect far more of themselves in terms of their commitment and involvement in course related activities than it is common for a "subject" oriented instructor to expect from his students. Personal involvement in the learning situation and in questions dealing with the subject matter serves as a springboard to wide ranging involvements. In fact, the instructor finds himself in the position of having to help students temper too expansive projects and expectations.

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